planning and research

# SCHOOL DISCIPLINE STUDY

## A SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

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## A Summary and Overview

**SUMMARY:**

- Forty-one percent of the participants felt school discipline as it was in 1975-76 was just about right. Parents especially endorsed this position.
- Thirty-two percent felt school discipline was a bit too lenient. Trustees and teachers especially held this view.
- Thirty-four percent felt school discipline should be stricter.
- The suggestion that after elementary school, in order to improve school discipline, pupils be allowed to quit school, was strongly opposed by parents, students and trustees in that order.
- Respondents rated good to very good the suggestion that students and teachers having discipline problems be offered guidance services.
- Students felt schoolwork should be more interesting. This idea was not strongly supported by other groups.
- Students, parents and teachers did not feel that students should participate in making and enforcing school rules.
- Traditional discipline (do what is necessary, including using the strap to keep discipline) divided participants, with sizeable groups holding extreme positions.
- Humanistic discipline -- more freedom, acceptance, encouragement -- divided participants with the majority opposed.
- The most frequently mentioned written suggestions for improving school discipline were participation, standards, school conditions, and understanding and acceptance of students in that order.
- Reasons given by respondents for discipline problems were irresponsibility, lack of respect for authority and property, and poor attitudes. Another frequently mentioned cause was lack of discipline in the home. Others were inappropriate action by teachers, poor parent-teacher rapport and poor student-teacher relations.
- A total of 9110 causes of poor school discipline were noted. Seventy percent felt they were located in the school, 21% out of school and the remainder in the relationship between the school and the home. Most participants felt the school should act to improve discipline.
- Female teachers were more opposed to letting students quit school, more in favor of parents backing up the school and teachers who were having discipline problems than were male teachers. Teachers over 30 and mathematics and science teachers held more traditional views on discipline than did younger teachers and those teaching English and social studies.
- Parents over 30 and "two parent" families were more conservative in views on school discipline than younger or "one parent" families.
- Students in matriculation programs were more traditional in their views on school discipline than non-college-bound students. However, the first group were also more in favor of humanistic measures of student control. These findings agree with the common view that non-academic students misbehave.

- The findings of the Alberta School Discipline study are less alarmist and show more satisfaction with school discipline than Gallup poll results. This may be because the Gallup poll did not provide opportunity for respondents to rate the state of school discipline in America nor to make an open-end statement about what they thought of school discipline.
- The views of the trustees and teachers were close together on what discipline **is** like and what it **should** be like. At the opposite end were students and superintendents. Parents and students were most opposed to letting students quit after elementary school.
- Although groups differ in their views on school discipline, group differences were overshadowed by the diversity of views within any one group.
- There was little difference in views on school discipline between participants associated with different grade levels and some differences between urban versus rural schools. In the view of participants with respect to school discipline, big was bad and small was good. The implications of the findings about the relationship between school size and participants' views of school discipline are most important.

## WHY THE ALBERTA SCHOOL DISCIPLINE STUDY?

The Alberta public was concerned about standards of behavior in our schools. School vandalism was a problem for many school boards and teachers were complaining that poor school discipline was interfering with teaching. Trustees felt that students were not serious about their school studies and were not developing good work habits. Parents complained that school discipline was too permissive yet did not want their children's initiative repressed. For these reasons, the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Alberta School Trustees' Association requested that Alberta Education fund and sponsor, with them, a study of school discipline. The Alberta Federation of Home and School Associations and the Conference of Alberta School Superintendents were invited to support the study.

## WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The study was designed to answer three basic questions: what **was** the current state of school discipline, what **should** discipline be like, and **what assistance** could be provided to practitioners in the field. This was done by surveying the views of nine groups associated with education.

## HOW DID THE STUDY ACHIEVE ITS OBJECTIVE?

An extensive review of the literature revealed that there were numerous books and articles which applied psychology and sociology theories to school discipline. A number of surveys were found, but very few other types of studies.

A questionnaire was designed, involving three open-end and eleven rating-type items on a seven-point scale. This was tried out, revised and adopted. It contained the name and number of the school or administrative unit, but did not ask for the name of the participant.

Because discipline can and does vary from school to school, the sample unit chosen was the school. One hundred schools of different size, grade level and area were chosen to represent the 1277 schools in the province. The sample was representative. Fifty associated administrative units were included in the study.

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The rate of return was 85% for teachers, 77% for students, 76% for trustees and an estimated 72% for parents. The return by groups was: 100 principals; 80 vice-principals; 1309 teachers; 1406 students; 48 superintendents; 233 central office personnel; 273 trustees; 1715 parents; and 64 regional office personnel. Total useable responses were 5230.

Responses to the eleven rating-scale type items were hand scored and the results returned, along with cumulative results, to the participating schools and administrative units. The open-end responses were classified and all of the data were key-punched, taped and tabulated by computer.

Because assistance to practitioners in the field was one of the purposes of the study, public discussion of the findings was deliberately sought. Results obtained were publicized through press releases, radio, television, talks, seminars, articles and monographs.

## WHO CONDUCTED THE STUDY?

The study was conducted by the University of Alberta and directed by S. C. T. Clarke, Director, Special Sessions. On the advisory committee were W. R. Duke, J. E. Reid, and W. P. Eddy, all of Alberta Education; Frank Robinson of the Conference of Alberta Superintendents; Barbara Skaley from the Alberta Federation of Home and School Associations; Robin Stuart of the Alberta Teachers' Association; and Lawrence Tymko of the Alberta School Trustees' Association.